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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000290

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV USAU MR
SUBJECT: CONSIDERING THE SENEGALESE MEDIATION

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 282
1B. NOUAKCHOTT 269
1C. BOULWARE/HANKINS VTC OF APRIL 22

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Democratically elected president Abdallahi intends to travel to Senegal on Sunday, April 26, accepting an invitation from President Wade. The FNDD and RFD remain open to participation in a Senegalese/African Union mediation subject to several large reservations. They believe (perhaps erroneously) General Aziz is, in fact, looking for a delay in the electoral process; therefore, they are pushing for a number of significant concessions. The French see little utility in the Senegalese mediation and no chance of a delay in the June 6 elections; however, they recognize the elections will do nothing to gain Aziz domestic or international legitimacy. End Summary

12. (C) FNDD Sees Itself on a Roll: Charge met April 23 with FNDD "Foreign Minister" Mohamed Ould Maouloud at his bustling party headquarters. Ould Maouloud explained the activity was due to the unexpected decision by the Governor of Nouakchott to authorize three anti-coup rallies later in the day. Ould Maouloud said the FNDD had been caught off guard since they assumed the regime would refuse the marches -- the FNDD's main point being to highlight the repression of political dissent. Organizers were now scrambling to get supporters out for marches they hadn't really expected to take place. Ould Maouloud characterized the decision as a sign of weakness on the part of General Ghazwany and Senate President M'Bare.

13. (C) Senegal: Ould Maouloud told Charge President Abdallahi had decided to accept an invitation from Senegalese President Wade to visit Dakar. Abdallahi will come to Nouakchott Sunday and fly to Dakar after a few meetings with supporters here. Ould Maouloud confirmed previous comments from him and from the RFD's Ahmed Ould Daddah that the opposition was prepared to enter into political negotiations in Senegal under certain conditions. Ould Maouloud emphasized that the opposition remains highly skeptical of Wade's intentions and certainly does not see him as devoted to democracy -- that said, they see Wade acting primarily out of ego. Ould Daddah insisted that any talks must be under the auspices of the African Union with Wade ideally limiting Senegal's role to that of "host" and, at most, serving as "co-president" with Jean Ping. He emphasized "we will never

allow Wade to dictate internal Mauritanian policies" adding that the FNDD leadership saw Senegal as having encouraged ethnic strife in Mauritania for years. Touching on the widely held belief that Senegal and Morocco had almost succeeded in getting the French to divide Mauritania between them at the point of independence, Ould Maouloud said Wade, "has never considered us as a real country and would welcome the chance to get the border territories.

¶4. (C) Despite their misgivings, Ould Maouloud saw political talks in Senegal as a means of derailing Aziz' election strategy. He confided that in the last week parliamentarians allied with Aziz had told Senate President M'Bare that he should consider delaying the election date and that he had been lobbied by a friend of Aziz to call for a postponement of the elections. He added that Senegalese Foreign Minister Gadio had told Ahmed Ould Daddah that Aziz was willing to push back the elections (According to Ould Maouloud, Gadio laughed when Ould Daddah said, "I understood Aziz had resigned. How would he be able to change the election date?"). Ould Maouloud thought Aziz wanted to get the elections postponed since he has been unable to entice an opposition candidate with enough clout to give the elections the credibility Aziz needs. Perhaps overstating the strength of his hand, Ould Maouloud suggested the opposition is now positioned to demand the cancellation of the election strategy, not just a postponement. Ould Maouloud also thought they could secure the release of FNDD detainees (especially Prime Minister Waghef) and dictate the structure of the talks.

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¶5. (C) Ould Maouloud stressed that any talks should include not just Wade and Ping but the rest of the International Contact Group and the UNSC P5 as co-guarantors. He backstepped a bit suggesting the Arab League should be excluded because they had offered to send observers to the June 6 elections "in violation" of the February 20 denunciation of the unilateral election process. Ould Maouloud noted he had had a very positive meeting with the Swedish Ambassador in Dakar who he would welcome as the representative of the EU Presidency in any Dakar talks -- certainly over the German ambassador who currently represents the EU Presidency in Nouakchott and who is seen as a bit of a cheerleader for the coup.

¶6. (C) Ould Maouloud thought an opposition delegation to any Dakar talks would include Prime Minister Waghef as Abdallahi's representative, President of the National Assembly Ould Boulkheir, an FNDD Troika, and Ahmed Ould Daddah. On the regime-side, he initially saw only General Ghazwany but then added Senate President Ba M'Bare could be included in his senate role but not as "Interim President."

¶7. (C) Despondent French: French Charge Marc Flattot (protect) told Charge April 23 the French were disappointed that no significant opposition candidates had filed their candidacy before the midnight deadline April 22. Flattot confided that France had heavily lobbied Ahmed Ould Daddah to participate in the elections but had been rebuffed. Former Prime Minister Zein Zeidane had been hoped for, but he also had decided against participation. Flattot recognized the final six candidates include Aziz, four "nobodies", and "one guy we've never heard of." He added, "We have a nice picture -- Aziz, another White Moor, a Haratine, and an Afro-Mauritanian," but he lamented the weakness of the opposition will result in elections, "that won't win Aziz any credibility either with other Mauritians or with the international community." That said, he saw no chance the Aziz would delay the elections because Aziz recognized Mauritania's economic situation would only get worse as time goes on which could derail his election chances no matter how well he planned things. Flattot dismissed the Senegalese mediation saying "Wade just wants to prove he exists and get another chance for his Nobel Peace Prize." In the end,

Flattot saw no way to turn off the Aziz electoral strategy but also saw no way to move forward after those elections.

¶ 8. (C) Recommendation: Mauritania is going nowhere fast. The looming June 6 elections will only complicate things by creating three degrees of separation from constitutional order that can be traced through the coup, the current "Transition Government," and a future illegitimately "elected" government. Without a wide range of options, the Senegalese mediation is the first effort the opposition has signaled they would participate in. Post recommends approaching the Senegalese to urge them to pursue their efforts based on the conditions posed by the FNDD and RFD. We believe that the opposition will eventually back off on their demand for the cancellation of the June 6 elections and release of detainees, but believe the indefinite postponement of the elections would be a non-negotiable precondition for talks.

HANKINS